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At Brunning: People & Technology: At the Only Edge that Means Anything/How We Understand What We Do

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At the Only Edge that Means Anything / How We Understand What We Do

by **Dennis Brunning** (E Humanities Development Librarian, Arizona State University) <dennis.brunning@gmail.com>

Annals of Search: Is Google Killing Search?

Right now **Google** and **Apple** are making tons of money from being first in class and best in class in their Web spaces. **Google** owns Web advertising; **Apple** controls a third of mobile devices that access the Web. There are two social media giants — **Facebook** and **Twitter**. Both are making some money putting advertisements before eyeballs. **Amazon** dominates Web retail with its eBook distribution through Kindle, but also it's targeted almost same-day retail involving small packages that deliver well through **FedEx**, **UPS**, and even **USPS**.

As yet, none of these big players perform in mobile as they do on desktop. **Microsoft** seems distracted with **Dell** and its floundering desktop business. **Facebook** edges up in share price just at the promise of doing something significant, attesting to the financial hope and demand for mobile. **Blackrock**, the venture capital firm, has lent money to **Twitter** in the form of stock option buy-backs so that **Twitter** can retain its talented employees who are sitting on their options. We are at a tipping point in online industry. Just what is the next move, and what does it mean for us?

Lately, in search, savants suspect that **Google** is killing search. What's meant is that **Google** can no longer support search neutrality in a mobile search environment which needs user location, works in the small information footprint of the mobile screen, and requires the least amount of intellectual energy of its user.

It is reporting season on Wall Street when many companies own up to how they've fared in the last quarter of the financial year, which includes Christmas sales. **Google** surprised everyone by incrementally raising revenues including revenue per click on its text advertisements. Harder economic times and competition had been driving profit per click down. This means that good times are slowly returning but also that **Google** dominates Web advertising. Where no one else makes money, **Google** does.

But they don't make money in mobile. Where **Twitter** is geared to make money for others — a **Justin Bieber** tweet for anything goes out instantly to 38 billion followers — and **Facebook** is growing a behind-the-curtain world of friends liking and buying like-minded stuff, no one has figured out how to anticipate a mobile user's information needs and deliver relevant information in a way that makes sense on the tiny screen. Believe it or not, the winner in mobile is going to be the company that miniaturizes search.

Or does away with it completely. This is what many **Technorati** believe **Google** plans for the next decade of search. It means figuring out how to understand search behavior and practice in a non-creepy way to triangulate information gathered by your smartphone to anticipate what information you need and deliver not as additional Web links but as pages that answer your question. In other words, killing search.

Google search hasn't impacted library search in positive ways, yet. Discovery services seem a defensive response and really beside the point. Killing search seems, at first glance, well beyond our means. Our way of business tends to divide

us so that crowd sourcing principles, central to **Google** search, is off limits. The "we can't predict search" ethos, central to our way of thinking about search and research, assures us that something like discovery services will only sample what lies just beyond our grasp.

Just the same, if **Google** is killing search, what homicide should we imagine to fully exploit what we offer our users? Suffice it to say we need to do more than offer a reduced experience when in fact, to keep up with **Google**, we need to kill search.

Your Links:

<http://adage.com/article/digitalnext/google-s-fight-kill-search-2020/238362/>

Aaron Schwartz — the Child Crusade

There is no way to think this guy was right. And there is no way not to feel sad at his passing.

Those that encouraged him to use his skills to violate the law and, when he did, kept him going for more gave him false or empty counsel.

If you occupy property, you'd better own it. And if the legal authorities arrest and successfully prosecute you, you confess, do your time, and quit doing what you've been doing that got the sheriff on your case in the first place.

Umberto Eco, the novelist, essayist, semiotician, and all-around intellectual of our times told the story of his youth and becoming all of the above. His friends were just like him, and they argued how many angels danced on the tip of a pin or didn't; they came up with arguments, proposed concepts and theories, and applied it to life as they knew it. This life was mainly poetry, literature, and the Italian cinema.

Eco relates that, although each of them argued loudly with erudition, poise, and hauteur, each of them knew, deep down, that these arguments melted, as **Marx** put it, into solid air when confronted with reality. For **Eco**, reality came crashing into "all this thinking" when his group of young intellectual rebels pinched something from a merchant and were caught. The storeowner called the "polizi," and they were hauled to jail. **Eco** spoke of the sheriff's hand on your shoulder, in command of your life. When this happens, he concluded, you should listen and think later.

It seems that **Aaron Schwartz** did not think about his own freedom from the law when he repeated two illegal download operations against the Federal government and against the non-profit publisher **JSTOR**. At least he should have zipped when he zagged when it came to rap sheet. Instead he was hired as faculty at **Harvard**.

It seems in hindsight that **Aaron** was the go-to tech guy for those on the copyleft who live to make publishing open. This openness is not philosophical; it's basic economics. **Aaron** hung with those who want intellectual property to be free. He knew how to pick the lock.

In tributes much has been made of **Aaron's** altruism, how he did not intend to profit from his illegal acts. He's portrayed as acting within extenuating circumstances of the information access rights issue, and his behavior should be understood as benevolent. This understanding is

utilitarian utopianism in the extreme. He would jack government documents and scholarly articles from behind their pay walls and deliver them gratis to the world.

Sadly, the sheriff caught him, and the sheriff follows the law. Those a lot less fortunate, bright, or encouraged know that you don't do the crime if you can't do the time.

Your Links:

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/da5ebf98-5f3a-11e2-be51-00144feab49a.html>

John Gapper's column in the *Financial Times* — honest about OA, honest about STM, honest about **Aaron Schwartz's** passing...

Where the Wild Things Are: eBooks and the No One Shelf Edition

In 2012 eBooks were everywhere and nowhere. The trade books froth in competition; numerous platforms, e-bookstores, and reader/app providers compete to put that digital book before the customer.

The consumer-directed giants, **Amazon**, **Apple**, and **Barnes and Noble** continue to innovate on devices and applications that will serve up their wares to a widely-diversified group of users. Public libraries have **Overdrive** to license and distribute some books to libraries with no appreciable cost savings for libraries. It's pay-through-the-nose time but, hey, what's new?

Meanwhile, academic libraries and their providers have settled into browser-delivered content with licenses that pretty much mimic how academic books were bought and sold in print. Downloading has been introduced by some vendors and publishers, but downloading basically means checking the book out for exclusive use of one user. This pretty much reprises how books were loaned in the past.

In this environment we learn of a few experiments to move the library model forward. We have **Smashwords**, for example, an online publishing site that specializes in self-publishing making some deals with libraries for self-published content. Public libraries in California and Colorado, for example, have inked deals with **Smashwords** for over 10,000 titles free of DRM and pretty much owned in perpetuity for their users. The big problem is that these are not front-list, mid-list, or even back-list titles. They are the brave new world of author-driven publishing and succeed or fail on this notoriety.

Traditional publishers are not free from this user-directed challenge. They are buying up self-published content, and companies like **M&A** were the way to solve publishing's challenge to the Internet disruption. In general, this means buyer beware for librarians and consumers, in that no title, without scrutiny, can be purchased without a good chance that it lacks the traditional vetting process of established publishers. Some say, who cares? Well, anyone who has ever paid for a book that really needed editing from the get-go. We live in a time where anyone can be an author, but it is also an era of should everyone be one.

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We can't afford to build context into content after the fact. Doing so irrevocably truncates the deep relationships that authors and editors create and often maintain until the day, hour, or minute that containers render them impotent. Building back those lost links is redundant, expensive, and ultimately incomplete.

This isn't a problem of standards. At **Indiana University**, **Jenn Riley** and **Devin Becker** have vividly illustrated our abundance of contextual frameworks. The problem we face, the one we avoid at our peril, is implementing these standards.

Ultimately, that's a function of workflow.

If you want to change workflow, you are looking at the publishing equivalent of a heart transplant. And starting with context requires publishers to make fundamental changes in their content workflows.

At a time when we struggle to create something as simple as a clean ONIX feed, planning for and preserving connections to content is a challenge of significant proportion. New entrants are already upon us, and we don't have much time to get this new challenge right. But in a digital era, how publishers work is how they ultimately compete.

Although the precise changes in workflow will vary by publisher, certain principles apply. Moving from "product" to "service" or "solutions" means four things for publishers:

- Content must become open, accessible, and interoperable. Adherence to standards will not be an option;
- We'll need to focus more clearly on using context to promote discovery;
- Trying to compete with businesses that already use low- and no-cost tools is a losing proposition. We need to develop opportunities that encourage broader use of our content; and
- Publishers can distinguish ourselves by providing readers with tools that draw upon context to help them manage abundance.

Given these four implications, it seems clear that the publishing community will need new skill sets to compete in an era of abundance. We'll probably have to add a lot more training than we have ever done internally. Nevertheless, those aren't the toughest challenges. Changing workflow is.

It is a time of remarkable opportunity in publishing, one in which we are able to find and build upon strands of stories, in context. Yes, we face a significant challenge preparing for a very different world, but it is a challenge I think we have the insight and experience to meet. What we choose to do now will begin to determine which stories get told, as well as who writes — and publishes — them.

Author's Bio

Brian O'Leary is founder and principal of **Magellan Media**, a management consulting firm that works with publishers seeking support in content operations, benchmarking, and financial analysis. **O'Leary** writes extensively about issues affecting the publishing industry. With **Hugh McGuire**, he is editing "Book: A Futurist's Manifesto," a collection of forward-looking essays on publishing that is being published in three parts by **O'Reilly Media**. 🍄

against the grain people profile

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BORN AND LIVED: Born in Melrose, Massachusetts. Grew up in Massachusetts and have lived in Chicago, New York, Singapore and New Jersey.

EARLY LIFE: Attended **St. John's Preparatory School** (Danvers, MA), **Harvard College** (Cambridge, MA) and Harvard Business School (Boston, MA)

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: From 1983 to 1995, various operational roles on three **Time Inc.** weeklies, including **TIME** magazine. From 1995 to 1998, senior vice president and associate publisher for **Hammond Inc.**, a reference publisher now owned by **Langenscheidt**. Since 1998, a consultant to magazine, book and association publishers.

FAMILY: Married to **Elizabeth W. McCarthy**; three children.

IN MY SPARE TIME: I try to golf and occasionally garden; have volunteered as an elected member of a board of education and a trustee of my high school.

FAVORITE BOOKS: *Look Homeward Angel* (**Thomas Wolfe**), *Out of Control* (**Kevin Kelly**), *Mountains Beyond Mountains* (**Tracy Kidder**).

PET PEEVES: I don't do too well with rudeness.

PHILOSOPHY: Socially liberal, fiscally conservative, but always in that order.

MOST MEMORABLE CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: Presenting "Context first," which had been illustrated by my oldest child, who is an artist, to an audience of 1,400 people at **O'Reilly Media's** "Tools if Change" conference in New York in 2011.

GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW: To put some of my ideas to the test (in a non-consulting role), to write and publish at least one book, and to have at least one year during which I don't work on any Saturdays, Sundays, or holidays.

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: In established markets, sales of physical and digital objects — containers — will be flat or fall slightly; prices will fall as well, putting pressure on most publishers. Unit growth in emerging markets will be more robust, but prices will not match those seen in the past in established markets. Cultivating global communities and meeting their content requirements will become a way for content producers to differentiate themselves. Success here will leverage increasingly sophisticated metadata and the enormous reach offered by the Internet. 🍄



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A special challenge for librarians is understanding what books mean to readers who rely on librarians to select, distribute, and pay for eBooks — or any book, for that matter. This is one of the recurrent themes in **Umberto Eco** and **Jean-Claude Carrière's** book *This is Not the End of the Book*. **Eco**, the author of *The Name of the Rose*, *Foucault's Pendulum*, and *Theory of Semiotics*, and **Carrière**, a screen writer for **Godard** and **Bunuel**, speak at length about the book's future in the Internet age.

Eco and **Carrière** say many things comprehensible to librarians and many things that won't make sense. You would need to agree with **Nicholson Baker**, another author whose passion for the book often brings him in conflict with how librarians think and act. **Baker** is convinced that librarians can't be trusted to preserve knowledge through the book's legacy. **Eco**, for example, states immediately what he said almost two decades ago about the Internet, computers, and the book. The book, like the

spoon or the corkscrew is a technology at the limit of its form and expression. You can't make a better spoon, and you can't improve upon the book as a way to communicate themed and nuance information, at length, with some sobriety, style, and meaning.

This is very much an aesthetic, scholarly, intellectual, and humanitarian view of the book. Yet it does acknowledge the book as a basic unit in cultural memory and transmission. Read it to test your knowledge of incunabula in an electronic age. Memorize their photographs — faculty like these guys would cost you dearly in patron-driven purchase. They want it all...

Your Citation:

This is Not the End of the Book: A Conversation Curated by Jean-Philippe de Tonnac

Author: **Jean-Claude Carrière**; **Umberto Eco**; **Jean-Philippe de Tonnac** (London : Vintage, 2012.) 🍄